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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 000723

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SUBJECT: CPA'S LIU BAINIAN SAYS CHINA HAS TRIED TO EASE TENSIONS WITH VATICAN, BUT ORDINATIONS WILL CONTINUE

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Classified By: Classified by Political Internal Unit Chief Susan Thornton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶11. (C) Vice-Chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) Liu Bainian said China sought to ease tensions with the Vatican in the lead-up to Gan Junqiu's ordination as bishop of Guangzhou Diocese. Liu says China informed the Vatican of the pending nomination and has postponed appointment of other bishops. Liu blamed recent strains in the Sino-Vatican relationship on "third parties in Hong Kong and Taiwan" and downplayed the Chinese Government's role in bishop appointments. Stating that he could not comment on the Vatican's announcement that it will establish a commission to handle Chinese affairs, Liu said he hopes the Vatican will take constructive steps in this area, but said the Chinese Catholic church must continue ordaining bishops in order to serve the Catholic faithful in China. Poloff urged the CPA to coordinate with the Vatican on future ordinations. End summary.

Coordinating Appointments with the Vatican

¶12. (C) CPA Vice-Chairman Liu Bainian told poloff January 24 that China has worked hard to improve relations with the Vatican. Guangzhou Diocese, which has been without a bishop since May 2001, began considering a new appointment in 2004 or 2005. Priests and nuns from Guangzhou Diocese selected Gan Junqiu for nomination as bishop in October 2006 and subsequently reported this to the Chinese Catholic Bishops' College for study and review. After the Bishops' College began reviewing Gan, priests in Guangzhou acting with the Chinese Government's knowledge, informed the Vatican of the pending nomination to give the Vatican an opportunity to approve it. Following a separate review, the Vatican approved. So long as the Chinese Catholic Bishops' College also approves, church officials will move forward with ordination.

¶13. (C) Liu also said China has postponed appointments in some of the other forty Chinese dioceses currently lacking bishops, to give the Vatican time to approve. Rome's refusal to approve bishops in the past, Liu

said, has sometimes made it necessary for China to move ahead on appointments to serve the Catholic faithful. However, China is now delaying the ordination of some bishops approved by "the Chinese side," to give the Vatican more time. Liu said the Chinese Government's limited knowledge of Catholicism has complicated efforts by Chinese Catholics seeking to communicate with the Vatican about the appointment of bishops or take other steps to ease tensions between China and the Vatican.

¶4. (C) Liu blamed recent strains in the relationship between China and the Vatican on "third parties, especially in Hong Kong and Taiwan." Liu downplayed the role of the Chinese Government in selecting bishops, saying that the Government simply requires that "nominated bishops are not against the Government." The core qualifications, he maintained, are religiously-based and imposed by the church: a qualified nominee must (a) be devout; (b) have expertise in Catholic theology; (c) be over 35 years old; and have served as a priest for at least 5 years. Liu said there is no requirement that a candidate belong to the Catholic Patriotic Association, only that he "be respected by others" and "certainly not be against the government."

New Vatican Commission

¶5. (C) Liu could not comment on the Vatican's recent announcement that it will set up a permanent commission to handle China affairs, since he is unfamiliar with the details surrounding its creation. Liu did say, however that the "composition" is key. If people "who are against improving China-Vatican relations" dominate the commission, it will play a negative role. Liu said the commission should not

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include people who represent particular political interests, such as Taiwan. He asserted that the Vatican has dragged its feet on normalizing relations with China "because Chen Shui-bian gives the Vatican money." The Chinese Government, Liu said, is taking a "wait and see" approach to the Vatican's newly formed commission.

¶6. (C) Liu said he remains optimistic about the future of Sino-Vatican relations. Both sides want to improve relations, but advisors who dislike China because of its political system have held sway over Pope Benedict, he asserted. Liu said he hopes to assist the spread of the Catholic faith in China but that, to do this, Chinese Catholics must be "at one" with the Pope. The Vatican should take the initiative to help shape Chinese opinion more positively. Liu said he hopes the letter the Pope plans to write to China will "show love" towards the Chinese. If the Pope conveys a "favorable impression" to the Chinese, more Chinese will be receptive to Catholicism. If the Pope "fails" in this, it will be more difficult to "spread the faith in China."

¶7. (C) Whether or not relations improve, Liu said, the Chinese Catholic church will be obliged to continue ordaining bishops in order to meet the needs of Chinese Catholic faithful. Poloff urged the CPA to continue coordination with the Vatican in future ordinations and to build positively on the recent improvement in Sino-Vatican relations.

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